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GOODBYE, WONDERFUL BANGLADESH

By
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U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh

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Over three years have passed, but it seems like yesterday when the plane landed at Shahjalal Airport, bringing my wife Grace and me to Dhaka to take up my assignment as America's Ambassador to Bangladesh.

Having traveled halfway around the world, we were so tired ... Grace got off first ... and I followed behind, dragging a huge bag. It was so heavy, but I dragged it through the terminal and thumped it down the stairs and into the lounge, where I held a press conference. Just as the press event was ending, a journalist queried, "What do you have in that big bag?" "Oh," I responded, "that is my mandate ... my mandate to broaden, to deepen, to strengthen America's partnership with Bangladesh."

The journalist wondered why my mandate is so big. The answer is simple. Bangladesh is big; Bangladesh is important. It is the world's eighth largest country, the world's third largest Muslim-majority country. Bangladesh is a moderate, tolerant, secular, pluralistic alternative to the violent extremism that scars other countries.

Bangladesh matters strategically to America in countering terrorism and violent extremism, fostering regional security, sustaining global peace through peacekeeping, achieving global food security, expanding trade and investment, promoting democracy and respect for human rights, and coping with disasters, especially earthquakes.

To advance these many interests, America promotes a Bangladesh that is peaceful, secure, prosperous, healthy and democratic.

On the eve of my departure from Bangladesh, I am pleased to report that America's partnership with Bangladesh is broader, deeper, stronger than ever, benefiting the people of both countries.

Secretary Clinton's 2012 visit to Bangladesh institutionalized the bilateral relationship by creating the Partnership Dialogue, which met for the third time in Washington two months ago. Earlier this year we also held the third annual sessions of the Security Dialogue and the Bilateral Defense Dialogue and the first session of the Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework Agreement (TICFA). All of these engagements energized, redirected and focused our partnership.

America's partnership with Bangladesh is helping to make history in so many amazing ways.

- Slashing maternal and child mortality rates, so Bangladesh can achieve these Millennium Development Goals.
- Enabling Bangladeshis to have the family size they want, Bangladesh is on a trajectory to achieve replacement level of 2.1 births per woman next year ... a voluntary achievement that rewrites history.
- Putting Bangladesh, once famously described as a bottomless basket, on the path to food self-sufficiency ... an achievement that no one ever imagined.
- Preparing for the impact of global climate change by preserving the forests that buffer the nation from rising sea levels and by introducing new saline, drought and flood-tolerant seeds.
- Securing maritime and land borders to stop trafficking of persons, arms and drugs, to interdict terrorists, and secure the nation's maritime assets. America will provide a second 378 foot cutter next spring to enhance maritime security.
- Safeguarding Bangladeshis from disaster by building another 130 cyclone shelters and helping preparations for an earthquake.

These achievements set the stage for Bangladesh to become Asia's next economic tiger.

This tiger would have four powerful legs: a massive apparel industry that has transformed itself to global standards for fire safety, factory structural soundness, and respect for workers' rights; huge shoe and finished leather goods industries that surge onto the global market once the eco-friendly tannery park in Savar opens; made-in-Bangladesh generic pharmaceuticals that sweep into America starting next year; and information technology, especial software development.

Small freighters, frozen shrimp, bone china, flowers, and jute and silk products would strengthen the tiger.

Bangladesh's success in bringing quality education to all children, improving the infrastructure (roads, railroads, ports, and power and gas supplies), and strengthening governance (corruption, red tape, rule of law, and threat of political instability) will enable Bangladesh, Asia's next economic tiger, the Royal Bengal Tiger, to strut powerfully across the global economic stage.

My heart is heavy as I prepare to depart from this great, rich nation and its wonderful, hard-working, creative, generous, entrepreneurial, and resilient people, whom I have gotten to know from my visits to all 64 districts.

Although my next home is far away, I will continue to do everything that I can to help Bangladesh build the Sonar Bangla of our shared vision.

Abar dekha hobe!

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